

Retrospective Theses and Dissertations

1999

The working relationship of international teaching assistants and undergraduate students

Marcella A. Farina PhD
University of Central Florida, marcella.farina@ucf.edu

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)
Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/rtd>
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

STARS Citation

Farina, Marcella A. PhD, "The working relationship of international teaching assistants and undergraduate students" (1999). *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. 2118.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/rtd/2118>

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA LIBRARIES



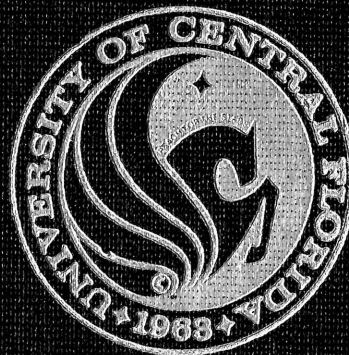
3 2103 00952 3089

THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP
OF INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS
AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

By
Marcella Adele Farina

1999

UCF



LD
1772
.F96
T45
1999
no. 46

THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP
OF INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS
AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

by

MARCELLA ADELE FARINA
B.A. Rollins College, 1987

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in TESOL
in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
in the College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
1999

© 1999 Marcella Adele Farina

ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to ascertain undergraduate views about the effectiveness of International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) in the American classroom. The study was administered to a stratified cluster sampling by college of the target population, undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida, in Orlando, Florida. The instrument used, Questionnaire of Undergraduates about International Teaching Assistants (QUITA) as developed by Wanda Fox (1990), is composed of a total of 40 items regarding personal and academic background, cultural exposure to and views about non-native speakers of English, and ITA-classroom effectiveness and problem-solving strategies. On the basis of data from the Fall 1998 semester, approximately 15% of the total number of ITA-taught course sections per college were surveyed. The subjects responded anonymously using computerized answer sheets. Upon completion of the data collection phase, all surveys were analyzed for response frequencies. In addition, background and demographic information regarding the participants and information regarding undergraduate exposure to ITAs and ITA instruction were also summarized. The Likert-type items were combined to reveal an overall ATITA (Attitude toward International Teaching Assistants) score. The results of the ATITA portion of the study indicate that undergraduate student views toward ITAs and ITA instruction are between neutral and mildly positive. Furthermore, survey responses indicated that undergraduates resolve conflicts involving ITAs through personal means. The closing recommendations

suggest maintaining open lines of communication between undergraduates, ITAs, and administrators alike.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are numerous individuals I would like to recognize as having contributed to realization of this document. From the professional contribution of expertise in a given field to the personal gift of encouragement and guidance, they have each greatly influenced and facilitated this undertaking, and I sincerely and equally thank them all.

I begin my gesture of appreciation by thanking various colleagues: Virginia Ludwig, for having initially brought the Plakans article, the model of the present study, to my attention, and for having frequently forwarded to me other useful and interesting literature regarding this topic; Mearle Choonoo, for pushing me forward when thoughts of withdrawal were near; Andres Ortega, for assisting me with various technological logistics, but most specifically with the revision of the QUITA map; and finally, Myrna Creasman, Associate Director of the Center for Multilingual Multicultural Studies, for having personally offered so much flexibility and support throughout the years.

I'd also like to thank various individuals from the University at large who have been instrumental in opening doors and shedding rays of light when most needed: Sabrina Andrews, Assistant Director of Institutional Research and Planning, for simplifying the seemingly overwhelming task of compiling University population totals; Lisa Wayte, Computer Services, for vital scanning and statistical assistance; all the professors who willingly gave of class time and a sincere interest in improved conditions for all students at the UCF; and Dr. Gail West, for having a clearer perception of the task at hand than I did

and offering her invaluable mentorship, with particular regard to the sampling procedure of this study.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the affective components of everything I do, my family: my parents, Alberto Farina and Anna Costantino Farina, for having nurtured me with the importance of a two-way mirror in education, both as a student and as a teacher; my husband, Enrico Ferroni, for constantly reminding me of the importance of balance in any endeavor in life; and lastly my son, Valerio Francesco, for the amazing little lunches of tuna and crackers he made for me while I was busy studying, for recognizing the day-after effects of late-night typing, for regularly interrupting me for a hug and kiss, and for words and feelings of encouragement, confidence, and pride. May I have the opportunity of passing along these grand contributions to his future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	x
NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY	1
Organization.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Research Questions.....	6
Hypotheses.....	6
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
Historical Background	7
Florida Legislature	8
Previous Research.....	10
METHODOLOGY.....	17
Design of the Study.....	17
Instrumentation	17
Population Data.....	19
Sampling Procedure	25
Institutional Review Board Approval	27
Data Collection	28

DATA ANALYSIS	29
Background Information	29
Experience with ITAs	34
Scale of Preferences	38
ATITA Score.....	43
RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	44
Results.....	44
Hypothesis #1.....	44
Hypothesis #2.....	45
Implications.....	45
Recommendations.....	47
APPENDICES	49
Appendix A.....	49
Written Permission of Wanda S. Fox	50
Appendix B	51
Questionnaire of Undergraduates about International Teaching Assistants	52
Appendix C	55
Informed Consent.....	56
REFERENCES	57

LIST OF TABLES

Distribution between NTAs and ITAs, Fall 1998	20
Number of ITA-taught Course Sections per College/Department, Fall 1998	22
Number of Sections Surveyed by College/Department, Spring 1999	24
Listing of Course Sections Surveyed in the College of Arts and Sciences	26
Listing of Course Sections Surveyed in the College of Engineering	27
Percentage of Respondent Exposure to Quantities of ITA-taught Course Sections	35
Percentage to Respondent Exposure to ITA Instruction in Major Field	36
Percentage to Respondent Exposure to ITA Instruction in Required Courses	37
Frequency/Percentage of Modes of Resolution for ITA Conflict	38
Scale of Preferences Response Summary	39
Positive and Negative Quality/Construct Association of Statements	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Population growth of ITAs at University of Central Florida, 1991-1998.....	3
Figure 2. Distribution of ITA-taught course sections by college.....	21
Figure 3. Distribution of respondents per year of study.....	30
Figure 4. Distribution of respondents per college.....	31
Figure 5. Distribution of respondents per region.....	32
Figure 6. Frequency polygon of GPA distribution.....	33
Figure 7. Frequency polygon of age distribution.....	33
Figure 8. Frequency polygon of ethnic distribution.....	34

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACTFL OPI	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Oral Proficiency Interview
ATITA	Attitudes toward International Teaching Assistants
CMMS	Center for Multilingual Multicultural Studies
ETS	Educational Testing Services
FSI	Foreign Service Institute
GPA	grade point average
GTA	graduate teaching assistant
IGTA	international graduate teaching assistant
ITA	international teaching assistant
NGTA	native graduate teaching assistant
NTA	native teaching assistant
OELP	Oral English Language Proficiency
OEPP	Oral English Proficiency Program
QUITA	Questionnaire of Undergraduates about International Teaching Assistants
SACS	Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
SEEQ	Student Evaluation of Education Quality
SPEAK	Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TSE	Test of Spoken English

CHAPTER 1

NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Organization

The present thesis consists of five broad areas of discussion each exposing an integral component to the situation relative to international teaching assistants (ITA) instruction in the undergraduate classroom.

Chapter 1 reveals the nature of the problem that was investigated, and research questions that were posed. The remainder of the chapter postulates the outcome of the study.

Chapter 2 is divided into three sections. The first section deals with competency issues and educational reform throughout the U.S. over the past twenty years while the second part explores in detail the legislative aspects regarding competency standards specific to the State of Florida. The last section presents numerous studies conducted nationwide regarding ITA instruction in other institutions.

Chapter 3 is composed of four sections and begins by describing the general design and various phases of the present study. It next includes a detailed description of the instrument used and all the modifications made to it. In addition, Chapter 3 exposes the sampling techniques implemented and supporting tables, and it concludes with a description of the data collection segment of the study.

Chapter 4 explores the results of the survey by presenting several tables and figures compiled from the data obtained. Information regarding demographics and prior

student experience with ITAs is revealed and calculated by both department and college; in addition, frequency summaries are combined for an overall total. Moreover, the statistical analysis includes the primary purpose of the study, which is to determine undergraduate views about ITAs and the relationship between scores reflecting undergraduate attitudes toward ITAs and survey items addressing previous experience with ITA-taught sections.

Chapter 5 reflects on the study results by summarizing primary outcomes and synthesizing undergraduate attitudes. It continues by exploring the implications of the results and concludes by recommending further steps in order to improve the ITA and undergraduate working relationship in the classroom.

The final two sections consist of various relative appendices of supporting documentation and the complete list of references employed.

Introduction

In the late 1970s, United States universities caught the attention of a rising number of international students (New Census Data, 1992). At that time about 44 % of the foreign students enrolled in universities in the United States were graduate students who relied heavily on the economic support of teaching assistantships (Zikopoulos, 1989).

Since then, an increasing number of non-native speakers of English has found their place as graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in undergraduate classrooms (Fox & Gay, 1994).

This has also been true for the University of Central Florida, where ITA growth over past decade has likewise been significant. During the past eight years, the ITA population has more than quadrupled while the ACT FTE allocation is now almost five times greater. Although 1994 and 1995 showed a reduced number of ITAs and ACT FTE

Furthermore, the ACT FTE allocation has had a mean increase of 5.48 per year over the eight-year time period. And finally, the ratio of ITAs to the number of ACT FTE allocations has maintained a mean of 2.32 ACT FTE allocations per ITA.

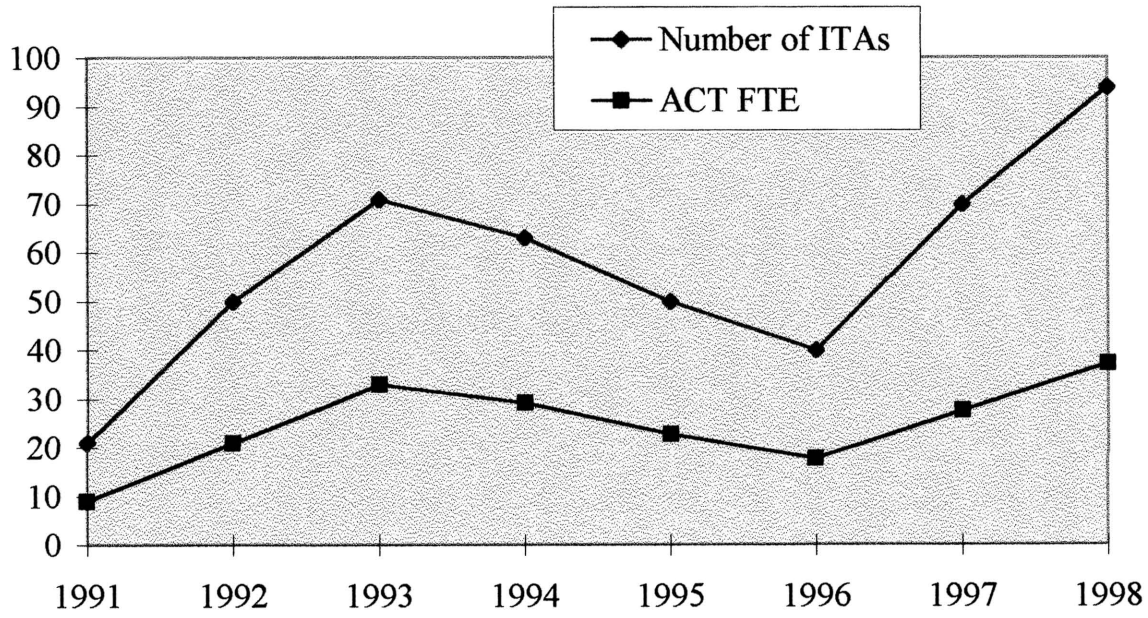


Figure 1. Population growth of ITAs at University of Central Florida, 1991-1998.

Over the years, while the number of international graduate students applying for teaching assistantships has grown, state legislators have also voiced serious concerns with regard to the language proficiency assessment required of international teaching assistants (ITAs) (Williams, Barnes, Gerald-Finger, & Ruffin, 1987). At the present time, twenty states in the U.S. have mandates that stipulate the need for the assessment of non-native speakers of English before granting those individuals teaching assistantships and assigning them teaching duties at American universities (Thomas & Moroson, 1993). Florida is one of the twenty states.

Statement of the Problem

Presently at the University of Central Florida (UCF), ITAs are accepted as graduate teaching assistants based upon having met the minimum score requirement of 220 on the Test of Spoken English (TSE) or 3 on the Foreign Service Institute Language Proficiency Interview (LPI). These assessments are conducted either at the University, upon arrival, or in the home country, before departure. As stated in the UCF 1998-1999 Graduate Catalog, the college or department can also evaluate the oral language skills of the graduate student seeking a teaching assistantship. No other formal assessments are conducted to objectively evaluate ITA linguistic ability or communicative competence, nor do ITAs receive cultural orientation training prior to entering the educational setting of an American classroom. Educators from various departments where ITAs are utilized have expressed their concerns over the issue of language proficiency. Frequently, these faculty members contact the University's Intensive English Program housed in the Center of Multilingual Multicultural Studies (CMMS). Pronunciation and grammatical inaccuracies are typically the primary obstacles of ITAs; however, reflective thought on the notion of utilizing ITAs with undergraduate instruction also brings cultural and didactic concerns to mind.

Due to linguistic and sociolinguistic obstacles, these foreign graduate students are truly at a disadvantage as they enter the American educational field. Furthermore, the absence of a formal ITA training program conducted by experts in the English as a Second Language (ESL) field increases the odds for a negative teaching experience on the part of the ITAs themselves and, ultimately, a negative learning experience for the undergraduate students taught by ITAs.

The role of a student varies from culture to culture, as does the role of a teacher. International teaching assistants are often faced with the dilemma of interpreting student

behavior as well as wondering about their own behavior as teachers. The appropriateness of these compartments is vital to effective teaching. In addition, students are confronted with the scenario of sifting through accented speech, irregular language usage, and unfamiliar teaching signals as they attempt to successfully delve into the subject matter at hand while still maintaining a solid grade point average (GPA) in their own studies. Several factors can intertwine to create, at times, a less than desirable educational arrangement. All this causes frustration and anxiety for undergraduates, ITAs, and administrators, alike.

However, the ITA-undergraduate experience also holds many positive and useful benefits. For example, ITAs also enjoy the benefits of experiencing their specialization in an American setting and with an American audience while gaining expertise with the vocabulary, expressions, and pronunciation pertinent to their field of study. Furthermore, the opportunity for teaching assistantships exposes ITAs to the roles of students and teachers in the American classroom. Being permitted to instruct in an undergraduate classroom offers numerous occasions to authentically explore classroom culture and teaching strategies. Undergraduate students can also benefit from being enrolled in a section taught by an ITA because the multinational atmosphere, created with the presence of non-native speakers of English, can spark more varied learning discussions as well as challenge undergraduate students to acknowledge and accept different communicational skills and cultures.

Teaching assistantships for non-native speakers of English at UCF are a valuable tool for merging people, cultures, and knowledge. Therefore, ITAs, undergraduate students, and college administrators need to assess the present effectiveness of ITA instruction by opening the lines of communication to the recipients of ITA instruction, the undergraduate students.

Research Questions

1. Do undergraduates perceive the classroom relationship with ITAs as a positive, productive rapport that facilitates learning?
2. Do undergraduates tend to employ personal means in order to remedy conflict involving ITAs?

Hypotheses

1. As has occurred at university campuses across the U.S. (Smyrniou, 1995; Douglas and Selinker, 1994; Fox & Gay, 1994; Plakans, 1997; Jacobs & Friedman, 1988; Twale, Shannon, & Moore, 1997; Yule & Hoffman, 1993), it is hypothesized in the present study that the population surveyed is predominantly displeased with the overall instructional performance of ITAs and that, in general, undergraduate students feel that the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and communicative competences of ITAs are inadequate and restrict the ITAs from performing their duties optimally.
2. Furthermore, it is postulated that undergraduate students tend to resolve conflicts regarding ITA instruction through personal means rather than seek assistance through institutional channels.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Background

From 1982 to 1991, legislatures initiated educational reforms, destined to certify the English language competency of faculty before entering the classroom, implemented laws, set governing policies, and issued executive orders directed at institutions of higher education (Monoson & Thomas, 1993). Some of the uprising was derived from American students and parents, and in an attempt to calm the waters, legislation required that ITAs be certified in Oral English Language Proficiency (OELP) (Creswell, 1990). The following twenty states passed some form of a mandate establishing standards of communicative competence among teaching assistants (TAs): Oklahoma (1982), Florida (1983), Tennessee (1984), Arizona and Kansas (1985), Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, and Oregon (1986), California, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Georgia (1987), Iowa and Texas (1989), Pennsylvania (1990), Louisiana and South Carolina (1991), Wisconsin and Kentucky (1992) (Thomas & Monoson, 1993).

The notion of oral proficiency and the audience to whom it was addressed were modified over the past fifteen years. It is noteworthy that the first law on oral proficiency was passed in 1982 in Oklahoma and stated that both employed and prospective instructors must be English-proficient (Thomas & Monoson, 1993). In 1989 and 1990, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) mandated that all ITAs be required to pass the Test of Spoken English or other reliable evidence of oral proficiency

and communicative competence (Fox & Gay, 1994). Monoson and Thomas (1993) cite the Pennsylvania Bill of 1990 as having elicited great concern from the faculty in public institutions because document wording referenced the proficiency all faculty members and did not specifically and exclusively mention ITAs. The bill was amended protecting the interests of faculty members by specifying that the oral proficiency requirement be applied to all ITAs. The Louisiana 1991 legislation required all instructional faculty, including TAs, to be proficient in English. Another variation of language proficiency legislation involves the Iowa bill, which mandates instructional assistance and evaluation for ITAs (Monoson & Thomas, 1993). The most recent bill was passed in Kentucky in 1992 and clearly adds that any instructor receiving two unsatisfactory language proficiency evaluations will be terminated. Some states, such as Florida (1983), utilize the same assessment used for teacher certification while other states, such as Illinois (1986), direct the universities to establish an oral assessment program (Thomas & Monoson, 1993). Clearly, the stipulations of each state's mandate remain slightly different one from the other, yet the ultimate objective is to attest to the language proficiency of educators.

Florida Legislature

Chapter 6B.5, Standards of Competent Professional Performance (1994), of the State of Florida Department of Education Statutes addresses the issue of competency among the educational professional; it is further divided into twelve sub-chapters. The chronological history of the laws listed establishes the implementation date as October 7, 1969, and the repromulgation date as December 5, 1974. Various aspects of these laws were also amended on August 12, 1981, and later on April 5, 1983.

The first two sub-chapters, 6B-5.001 and 6B-5.002, introduce definitions of the terminology used in the remaining sections and set forth the notion that the standards described are intended as minimal standards of Florida's education profession and are applicable to all those who teach in the State of Florida as well as to those who supervise and provide administrative services to those who teach. The third sub-chapter listed, 6B-5.0021 entitled Personnel Reviews: Assistance and Competence Reviews, was repealed on February 18, 1993. The following nine sub-chapters focus on specific issues: Administrative and Supervisory Requirements, Analysis of Individual Needs and Individual Potential, Instructional Procedures, Communication Skills, Management Techniques, Competence in Specialization, Evaluation of Learning and Goal Achievement, Human and Interpersonal Relationships, and Personal Requirements.

Of particular pertinence to the implementation of ITAs in instructive capacities are sub-chapters 6B-5.004 through 6B-5.011, which address the linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural aspects of teaching. Sub-chapter 6B-5.004, entitled Analysis of Individual Needs and Individual Potential, discusses the need for competent assessment of student level, skill, and development, and the integration of student interests with teaching objectives. Sub-chapter 6B-5.005, Instructional Procedures, begins by clearly stating that each educator shall demonstrate competence in establishing rapport with students through the use of appropriate visual and verbal devices. It also stresses the importance of promoting student interaction by encouraging free expression, and assuring that tasks are understood through the use of feedback techniques. The area of communication skill competence, sub-chapter 6B-5.006, outlines seven aspects of the competency standard: task-relevant language and terminology, language that coincides with the ability of the individual or group, coherent and logical oral communication, logical and understandable writing style with appropriate and correct language, comprehension and interpretation of

oral messages, ability to extract major ideas from statements, and encouragement of free expression among learners. Sub-chapter 6B-5.007 specifically addresses the establishing of appropriate behavioral standards, the identifying of inappropriate behavior and employing of appropriate techniques for correction, and the use of setting-appropriate management techniques. Sub-chapter 6B-5.008 simply states that each competent educator shall demonstrate an awareness of current developments in their field of specialization and an ability to utilize professional material. Sub-chapter 6B-5.009, Evaluation of Learning and Goal Achievement, states that each competent educator shall demonstrate the ability to utilize varied evaluative techniques, provide frequent and prompt responses to tasks attempted, effectively analyze and interpret results and achievement of stated goals, incorporate results in counseling and program planning, and clearly explain evaluative methods and procedures. The penultimate sub-chapter, 6B-5.010 entitled Human and Interpersonal Relationships, addresses several issues of a cultural nature: values, attitudes, beliefs, behavior, social interaction, and leadership. Basic competence is defined as the ability to assist students in the development of positive intrapersonal and interpersonal skills for their own benefit and the benefit of the group. The final sub-chapter, 6B-5.011, describes the physical, communicative, emotional, and intellectual abilities that each competent educator shall possess. Although the State of Florida has established Standards for Competent Professional Performance in Chapter 6B-5, each institution in the State has the discretion to choose the form of assessment used to ultimately evaluate ITA proficiency.

Previous Research

Over the past two decades, several studies have been conducted to determine to what extent undergraduate students feel penalized by having a non-native instructor.

Typically, these studies take on the shape of a survey and attempt to assess both experiences with and attitudes towards ITAs. One such study conducted by Fox and Gay (1994) surveyed three areas of the university population: the university and faculty administrators, the native-speaker TAs and the ITAs, and undergraduate students. The researchers collected data using the Oral English Proficiency Program (OEPP) survey and the Questionnaire of Undergraduates about International Teaching Assistants (QUITA); the latter was developed especially for their work. Fox and Gay's findings revealed that undergraduates experienced many difficulties in understanding the ITAs and felt that the ITAs should be screened and trained. The administrators voiced concerns about parent and undergraduate satisfaction yet expressed the need for additional staffing in order to match the ITA training demand. The findings also revealed concern by the ITAs themselves saying that undergraduates possessed low academic skills and behaved disrespectfully. Fox and Gay recommended a broadening of the composition of the ITA program staff in order to meet the linguistic, cultural, communicational, and pedagogical needs of all concerned.

Another similar study conducted by Barbara S. Plakans (1997) administered a modified version of the QUITA (Fox & Gay, 1994) to a sample of the undergraduate student population. In addition, Plakans conducted focus-group interviews with a subset of the QUITA respondents in order to further survey the undergraduates with regard to their experiences with and attitudes toward ITAs. Indeed the findings revealed less than positive results in that undergraduates that had had at least one ITA experience had much less positive outlooks on the ITA arrangement than those who had never experienced ITA instruction at all. Plakans recommended opening the lines of communication by establishing a student advocacy center to serve as an intermediary between undergraduate students, the ITA, the ITA's department, the ITA training program, and administrators.

In Yule and Hoffman's study (1993), an evaluation sheet was developed by the researchers and utilized in two ways. Initially, it served to collect assessment information that would be compared for consistency to the assessment reactions of ESL instructors and administrator evaluations. The primary objective of this phase of the study was to determine if student viewpoints coincided with that of ESL instructors and administrators. The strong relationships between the three assessments, all agreeing 91% and 97%, respectively, established the consistency and value attached to the undergraduate evaluation of ITA performance. The second use applied by Yule and Hoffman was to have the undergraduates reassess the ITAs on a more frequent basis, providing abundant valuable feedback for the ITAs as well as a positive collaborative environment for both parties.

A different perspective was taken in a recent work by Twale, Shannon, and Moore (1997) which examined the self-ratings and undergraduate ratings of both Native Graduate Teaching Assistants (NGTA) and International Graduate Teaching Assistants (IGTA). The researchers chose the Marsh instrument, Student Evaluation of Education Quality (SEEQ) (Marsh, 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1991) which generates ratings for nine factors: learning value, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, breadth of coverage, examinations and grading, assignments, and workload/course difficulty. Results revealed that undergraduate ratings for ITAs were significant lower than ITA self-ratings, and although not in all areas of the SEEQ, the undergraduate ratings generally favored the NGTAs. Twale, Shannon, and Moore (1997) attribute a great deal of the preferences displayed toward the NGTAs as being accredited to linguistic and cultural factors.

In addition to the undergraduates' evaluation of ITAs, a study by Jacobs and Friedman (1988) looked at the effectiveness of ITA teaching versus the teaching of

native-speaker TAs. By comparing the undergraduate scores on a course-wide final examination administered equally to all sections, the researchers concluded that ITA-taught sections and native-speaker TA-taught sections fared equally well. Jacobs and Friedman (1988) conducted another analysis to determine if undergraduates possess a great deal of dissatisfaction with the ITAs. In general, ITAs considered in this study received the same final student evaluation ratings as the native-speaker TAs. Furthermore, when analyzing ITA English proficiency and instructor ratings, no statistically significant relationship was found between the ITAs English proficiency and student achievement (Jacobs & Friedman, 1988).

In 1995, Smyrniou also conducted a survey study of undergraduate students; however, Smyrniou's study considered undergraduate attitudes toward ITA instruction in required courses versus elective courses, and how these viewpoints influenced undergraduate attitudes, in general, toward TAs and ITAs. A questionnaire, based on Savignon's (1983) model of communicative competence, was developed by the researcher and administered to undergraduates from various departments. The results indicated that undergraduates have no preferences for the native language or cultural background of the TA if the course is an elective. However, undergraduates prefer to take required courses with native-speaker TAs, specifically for their linguistic, sociolinguistic, and communicative competences (Smyrniou, 1995).

Language and communication are not the only distinctions between ITAs and the general body of students they teach. The issue of cultural prejudice has also come to the surface. A recent study by Rubin, et al. (1995) examined the differences among students' perceptions of non-native English-speaking instructors of differing racial backgrounds. The findings suggest that being a person of color (Asian or African) does not negatively affect student ratings and, in fact, lends credence to a generalized xenophobic reaction to

non-native English-speaking instructors, rather than attitudes based primarily on degree of racial difference (Rubin, et al., 1995).

Obviously ITA ability cannot be assessed wholly on the opinion of undergraduate students. Smith, Byrd, Nelson, Barrett, and Constantinides (1992) indicate that several valid assessment tools are being used throughout the country and provide an avenue for identifying the actual proficiency of the ITA. The requirements established for acceptance into an ITA program also aid in setting the standard for the level of instruction a university can expect. Therefore, valid assessments are imperative.

The modes of assessment vary among the states with oral proficiency mandates. In spite of the fact that these forms of assessment do not adequately sample all language skills nor do they utilize authentic situational contexts, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has prevailed as a measurement of oral proficiency due to its practicality (Halleck & Moder, 1995). The most commonly required testing instrument of U.S. universities is the TSE; however, only California, Florida, Missouri, and Tennessee make use of this instrument as a means of assessing the proficiency of instructors (Thomas & Monoson, 1993). Whereas the TSE is administered and assessed by Educational Testing Services (ETS), the commercially produced Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit (the SPEAK test) is a compilation of retired TSE assessments which can be administered and assessed locally. Other forms of assessments include oral interviews, oral communicative performance tests, and teaching simulation (Smith, Byrd, Nelson, Barrett & Constantinides, 1992). In an attempt to explore other methods of testing oral proficiency, some programs have used the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Oral Proficiency Interview and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI); the latter offers guidelines to the placement of

ITAs on a 4-point scale ranging from novice to superior speaking ability (Halleck & Moder, 1995).

In addition to assessing the ITA's oral proficiency and communicative competence, institutions today are additionally concerned about ITA preparation in the areas of American culture and classroom communication techniques (Fox & Gay, 1994). According to research conducted by Monoson and Thomas (1993), 74 percent of the assessments in mandated institutions and 68 percent of the non-mandated institutions assess language only. Culture and pedagogy were included in the assessments of 11 percent of the mandated institutions and 21 percent of the non-mandated institutions. The form of assessment developed by Smith, Meyers, and Burkhalter in 1992 seems to cover the gamut. The ITA Test, as it is called by its developers, is composed of four sections. The first, Presentation Language Skills, evaluates the ITA's ability in the areas of pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and comprehensibility. The second section, Teaching Skills, evaluates the ITA by assessing twelve discrete points, such as organization of presentation, interaction, non-verbal communication, use of blackboard and visuals, and clarity of response to questions. The next section, Interactive Language Skills, assesses the ITA by examining the same points of pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and comprehensibility in interlanguage situations. The last section allows the evaluator to draw a global assessment as to the ITA's need for classroom training (Halleck & Moder, 1995).

Although additional assessments of oral language proficiency and communicative competence are available, they will not be explored at this point. The primary purpose of revealing the above-mentioned assessments is to establish the atmosphere of numerous practical possibilities and choices for those institutions desirous of establishing more-refined ITA criteria.

This compilation of literature has served as beneficial guide to formulating the present study. The historical and legislative information provided a basis for understanding statutory conditions. Furthermore, it became evident that the State of Florida has empowered each university to take action in order to provide the highest competency standards possible. By reviewing the previous research in the area of ITA effectiveness conducted by other individuals throughout the U.S., numerous potential study designs were exposed, and after a comparative examination of the various instruments utilized by other researchers, the QUITA was chosen as the most appropriate and reliable tool for collecting data in the present study. In addition, the recommendations offered in conclusion of the studies examined assisted in establishing a potential ultimate direction for the present study as well.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The present study was conducted in five basic phases: the selection of the survey instrument and permission request from the author for its use, the gathering of data with regard to University populations, the implementation of a stratified cluster sampling procedure, the request for use of human subjects issued by the University's Institutional Review Board, and finally the actual survey administration.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for the survey is based on the Questionnaire of Undergraduates about International Teaching Assistants (QUITA) developed by Fox and Gay (1990), with permission given by the author, Wanda S. Fox (see Appendix A). In adapting the questionnaire, consideration was also given to the revised QUITA, which was later implemented in the Plakans study (1995). In addition, the survey instrument used in the present study closely parallels the item sequence found specifically in the revised QUITA.

The QUITA employed in the present study (see Appendix B) is divided into three sections: Background Information, Experiences with ITAs, and Scale of Preferences. The latter is based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *uncertain* (3) to *strongly agree* (5). No content modifications were made to either section two or

three; these two sections of the survey instrument used in the present study were identical to the revised QUITA used in the Plakans study (1995).

However, adjustments were made to the first section to better adapt the instrument to the population being surveyed and UCF demographics. The items adjusted appear in Section 1, labeled Background Information, and involve the choices listed under items 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10.

The first areas that were modified were item 2 "Education" and item 3 "Academic Colleges". The former was modified to offer the four basic classifications for years of study: freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. The additional category of "other" was also included to accommodate instances where a respondent could not select among the other four. Item 3 was adjusted to represent the five colleges at UCF.

Major changes were made to the graphic representation of the geographic regions depicted in the U.S. map. The map from the revised QUITA was utilized; however, the original alphabetic characters indicating regions were replaced with numerical characters. Furthermore, the item number itself was changed to read item "4./5.", dividing the ten geographic regions listed into two 5-item lists. This was done to facilitate respondent selection on the computerized answer sheet.

Minor adjustments were made to Item 6, regarding age groups, which was revised to incorporate a broader range of age since UCF is predominantly a commuter university and regularly enrolls a large population of adults over the age of 24. In addition, item 9, regarding ethnic/racial background, was also modified to coincide with the ethnic classifications that appear on the State University System of Florida Application for Admission, indicating compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other UCF Undergraduate Admission materials. Lastly, item 10, which addresses living

arrangements, was also changed to reflect the absence of married housing on campus and the inclusion of on-campus apartments, both as stated in the UCF catalog.

The second section of the instrument, entitled Experience with ITAs, inquires as to the respondent's previous experience with ITAs, the number of course sections they have had with ITAs, and potential strategies employed in the event of problems with ITAs.

The third and final section, Scale of Preferences, consists of 21 statements each representing, either positively or negatively, one of three constructs. These constructs were based on the notion that students with generally positive attitudes toward ITAs would (1) be interested in and open toward other cultures and intercultural experiences, (2) believe that ITAs can be effective instructors, and (3) recognize and accept some personal responsibility for facilitating communication between themselves and ITAs.

The original QUITA contained 37 statements that Fox and Gay (1994) had tested for both construct and content validity, using *Q*-sorts and discrimination ratings completed by a panel of seven specialists. Fox and Gay had also verified administration procedures and instruction clarity through a pilot administration with undergraduate students.

The use of National Computer Systems form #217353, a computerized answer sheet on which responses were directly recorded by the participants, was employed to facilitate the later synthesizing of data.

Population Data

The second phase of the present study consisted of gathering pertinent data regarding the ITA population. This information was obtained through the University of Central Florida Institutional Research and Planning, located on UCF campus. Various

specific data were requested from the Fall semester of 1998: the total number of graduate students on teaching assistantships and their distribution between Native Teaching Assistants (NTAs) and International Teaching Assistants (ITAs). An ITA is defined as a graduate teaching assistant self-classified with the University as a non-resident alien. This category translates to an "O" classification throughout University records.

Table 1
Distribution between NTAs and ITAs, Fall 1998

	<u>n</u> = 341	%
NTAs	250	73
ITAs	91	27
Total	341	100

The data regarding ITAs were then distributed by college, and the percentage of ITA-taught course sections per college was tabulated.

The data regarding ITAs were then distributed by college, and the percentage of ITA-taught course sections per college was tabulated.

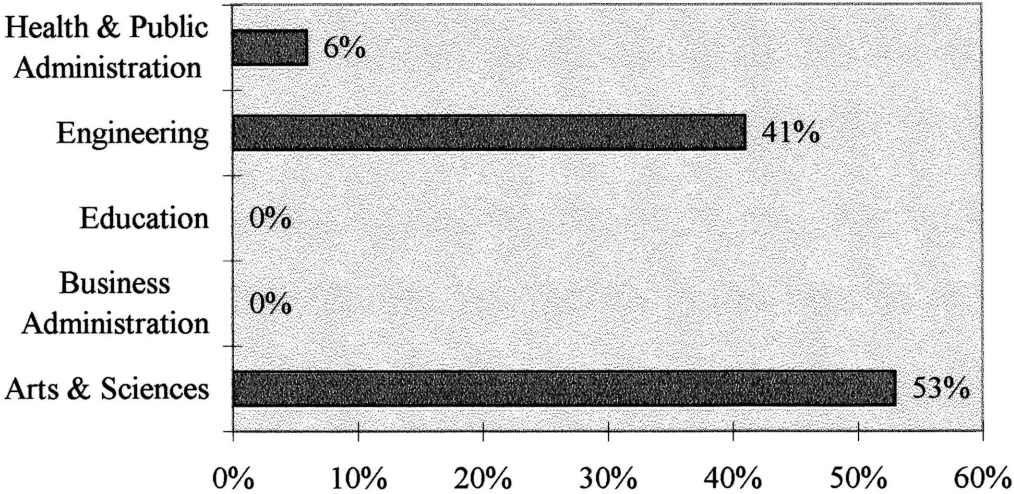


Figure 2. Distribution of ITA-taught course sections by college.

The college data was then reduced to departmental allocations by using an ACT FTE .250 equivalency per course section.

Table 2

Number of ITA-taught Course Sections per College/Department, Fall 1998

College/Department	Number of ITAs	ACT FTE	Number of ITA-taught sections
College of Arts & Sciences			
Biology	4	1.500	6
Communications	1	.250	1
Computer Science	13	6.500	26
Foreign Languages & Literatures	1	.240	0
English	1	.400	1
Mathematics	4	1.500	6
Chemistry	5	3.000	12
Physics	6	3.000	12
Psychology	1	.250	1
Statistics	1	.440	1
Total for College of Arts & Sciences	37	17.080	66
College of Business Administration			
College of Business Administration	0	0.000	0
Total for College of Business Administration	0	0.000	0
College of Education			
College of Education	0	0.000	0
Total for College of Education	0	0.000	0
College of Engineering			
Core Engineering Curriculum	1	.250	1
Civil & Environmental Engineering	3	1.000	4
Electrical & Computer Engineering	35	7.760	28
Industrial Engineering	3	1.000	4
Mech., Mat'l., & Aerospace Engineering	8	3.500	14
Total for College of Engineering	50	13.510	51
College of Health & Public Affairs			
Molecular & Microbiology	1	.500	2
Medical Laboratory Sciences	1	.500	2
Public Administration	1	.500	2
Health Information Management	1	.250	1
Total for College of Health & Public Affairs	4	1.750	7
Totals for all Colleges/Departments	91	32.340	124

One course section was calculated at .250 ACT FTE.

Once these data were summarized, it was determined that approximately 15% of the total number of ITA-taught sections per college would be surveyed. This percentage was established simply for practical purposes due to the large number of ITA-taught sections and predicted number of respondents. The allocated percentage was distributed proportionately among the departments involved. The Department of Biology in the College of Arts and Sciences was the only department that chose not to participate, which slightly altered the established percentage for the College Arts and Sciences to 13.6%. The College of Health and Public Administration was not included due to the fact that no one department generated a sufficient number of ITA-taught course sections to qualify.

Table 3

Number of Sections Surveyed by College/Department, Spring 1999

College/Department	Number of ITA-taught sections	Number of surveyed sections	%
College of Arts & Sciences			
Biology*	6	0	0
Communications	1	---	---
Computer Science	26	4	15.4
English	1	---	---
Mathematics	6	1	16.7
Chemistry	12	2	16.7
Physics	12	2	16.7
Psychology	1	---	---
Statistics	1	---	---
Total for College of Arts & Sciences	66	9	13.6
College of Engineering			
Core Engineering Curriculum	1	---	---
Civil & Environmental Engineering	4	1	25.0
Electrical & Computer Engineering	28	4	14.3
Industrial Engineering	4	1	25.0
Mech., Mat'l., & Aerospace Engineering	14	2	14.3
Total for College of Engineering	51	8	15.7
College of Health & Public Affairs			
Molecular & Microbiology	2	---	---
Medical Laboratory Sciences	2	---	---
Public Administration	2	---	---
Health Information Management	1	---	---
Total for College of Health & Public Affairs	7	---	---
Totals for all Colleges/Departments	124	17	13.7

*Department of Biology - non participant

Sampling Procedure

The subjects utilized for the present study were obtained through the use of a stratified cluster sampling procedure based primarily on a mean of 15% of the total number of ITA-taught undergraduate credit hours per college. Using the 15% ratio, two colleges qualified for inclusion in the study: the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Engineering. In addition, the course sections surveyed were all classified in the 3000 level. Therefore, the stratification of this sampling procedure is represented by the percentage of course sections surveyed per college and department while the clustering features is present in the use of established course sections at the 3000 level.

Initially, the established number of course sections to be surveyed were randomly selected. However, once contact was made with the appropriate individual from each department, information was obtained that rendered some of the randomly chosen sections inappropriate. Some such circumstances were course sections that meet only briefly and then retreat to laboratories for the remainder of the class or various course sections that basically have the same corpus of individuals registered because they follow a particular program of study. Professor recommendations were highly considered, and course sections were chosen based on such criteria. Additional input was also sought from department representatives and undergraduate coordinators. In spite of the eventual elimination of the randomization, careful attention was paid to course sections selected so that in all instances two characteristics were always present: course sections surveyed were presently not being taught by ITAs and all course sections surveyed were at the 3000 level. The mean enrollment of the sections surveyed was 39 students. No attempt was made to control any other strata pertinent to the clusters selected.

In the College of Arts and Sciences, four departments participated in the study: Computer Sciences, Mathematics, Chemistry, and Physics. The total estimated enrollment

count for the course sections chosen from these four departments was 172, 20, 105, and 60, respectively.

Table 4

Listing of Course Sections Surveyed in the College of Arts and Sciences

Department	Key Code	Prefix/ Number	Section	Estimated Count	Professor
Computer Science	COP	3402C	0001	52	Llewellyn
	COP	3503C	0002	60	Leeson
	COP	3530C	0001	35	Hughes
	COP	3930C	0002	25	Johnson
Mathematics	MAS	3106	0001	20	Martin
Chemistry	CHM	3120C	0001	35	Hampton
	CHS	3501C	0001	70	Fookes
Physics	AST	3211	0001	9	Barlow
	PHY	3101	0001	51	Llewellyn

In the College of Engineering, four departments participated in the study: Civil and Environmental Engineering, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Industrial Engineering, and Mechanical, Material, and Aerospace Engineering. The total estimated enrollment count for the course sections chosen from these four departments was 50, 138, 32, and 89, respectively.

Table 5

Listing of Course Sections Surveyed in the College of Engineering

Department	Key Code	Prefix/ Number	Section	Estimated Count	Professor
Civil & Environmental Engineering	EGN	3310	0003	50	Head
Electrical & Computer Engineering	EEL	3122C	0002	58	Tsannis
	EEL	3306	0001	32	Richie
	EEL	3307C	0001	32	Carter
	EEL	3552C	0001	36	Carter
Industrial Engineering	EIN	3304	0001	32	Thompson
Mech., Mat'l., & Aerospace Engineering	EMA	3012C	0001	29	Giannuzzi
	EGM	3321	0003	60	Chew

Once contact was established with the appropriate professor from each course section, arrangements were made for a convenient time to administer the questionnaire.

Institutional Review Board Approval

In this fourth stage of the study, formal request for use of human subjects was presented to the Institutional Review Board of the University of Central Florida Office of Research and Graduate Studies. Although the present study included no experimentation involving human subjects, assurance of protection of human subjects was nevertheless required. A summary of the protocol involved was presented along with a copy of thesis Chapters 1, 2, 3, and relevant appendices. These appendices consisted of the written permission of Wanda S. Fox, author of the QUITA, the modified QUITA instrument to be used in the present study, and a copy of the Informed Consent form (see Appendix C) to be distributed to the respondent immediately prior to the collection of data. All

documents were approved by the Institutional Review Board, with no request for revisions.

Data Collection

The survey was conducted over a two-week period during March of the Spring semester of 1999. Each survey was personally administered by the Researcher in order to ensure continuity of administration practices. The Researcher began by first introducing herself and briefly describing the purpose of the survey. Next, respondents were told that they would be receiving a packet with three items: the Informed Consent form, the QUITA, and the computerized answer sheet. They were instructed to first read, sign, and return the Informed Consent form prior to completing the questionnaire. In addition, the Researcher instructed the respondents to remain anonymous, this information also appears on the QUITA itself. Participants were then asked to record their responses on the computerized answer sheet and not on the survey instrument. Respondents were informed that twenty minutes of class time had been allotted for them to respond. The packets were individually distributed by the Researcher. The respondents completed the Informed Consent form, and while the Researcher circulated and collected the forms, the participants proceeded with the survey. Minimal assistance regarding questionnaire items was made available to the respondents as needed. The materials were collected in each course section and placed in a sealed envelope, which was labeled by department. None of the questionnaires was viewed until such time as the entire surveying phase had been completed.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

After the surveys were administered to each section involved, the data analysis phase began. The questionnaire responses of the 373 participants were analyzed for frequency totals per item. Data collected from the first section, Background Information, were analyzed for frequency, which revealed the demographic qualities of the group and descriptive statistical relevance. The data collected for the second section of the instrument, Experience with ITAs, were analyzed with special attention given to items regarding previous exposure to ITA instruction, items 14 and 15, and the manner in which undergraduates resolve conflicts with ITAs, item 18. Finally, the third section of data, Scale of Preferences, was analyzed for Likert-type response frequencies; the mean of the net total of all responses revealed the global viewpoint of respondents toward ITA instruction.

Background Information

The data collected revealed information regarding numerous aspects of the respondents. The areas of gender and age, academic college and year of study, and regional origin were specifically selected and summarized to determine the basic characteristics of the body of respondents surveyed in addition to the element of balance between certain categories. Of the 373 participants, a large number of valid cases ($M = 369$) were obtained for the items in Background Information.

According to the data, 274 (73.9%) of the 373 respondents were male. Most of the participants were either in their junior or senior year of study ($\underline{n} = 143$ and $\underline{n} = 153$, respectively). The remainder of the surveyed population consisted of 24 Freshman, 13 individuals, such as a post-bachalaureate or graduate status, and one missing case.

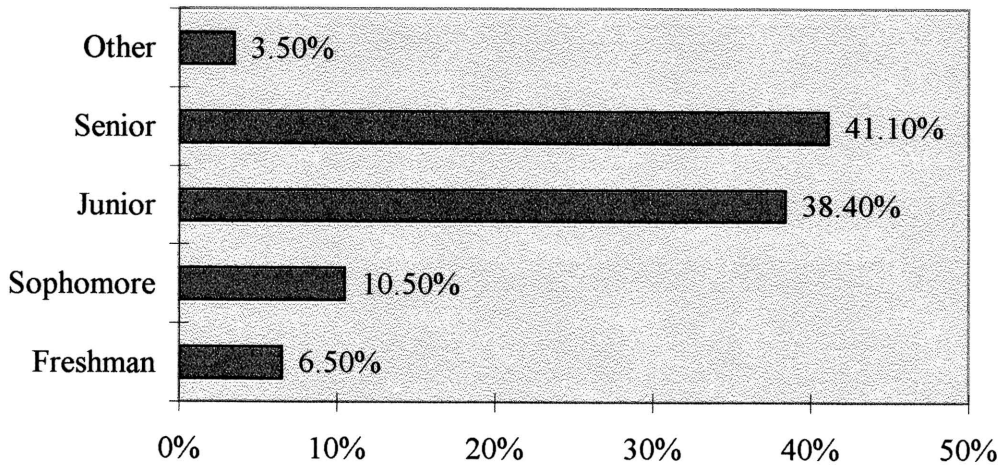


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents per year of study.

The distribution of respondents among the five colleges was greatest in the College of Arts and Sciences (36.4%) and the College of Engineering (60.9%), a predominance logically associated to the fact that they were the two colleges surveyed.

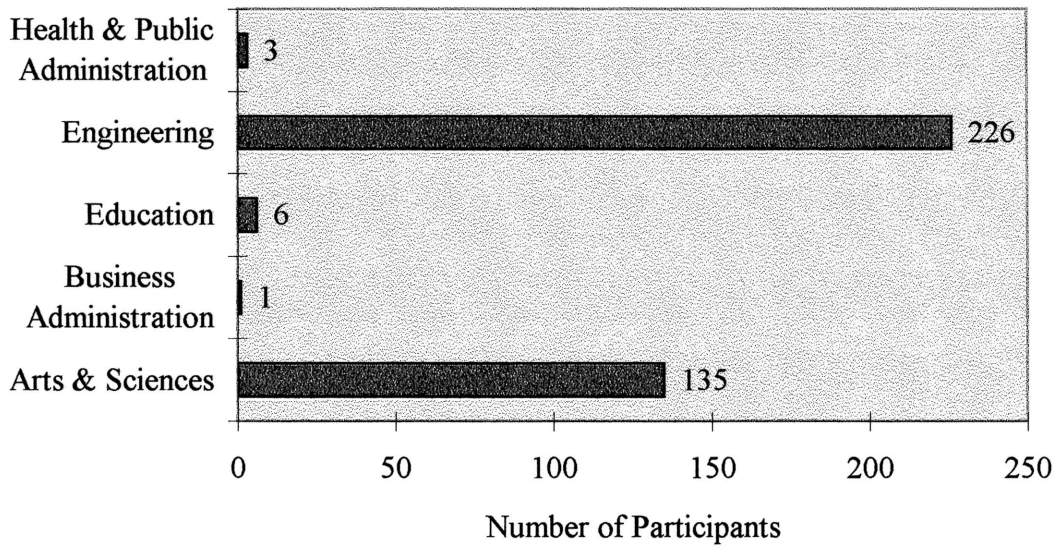


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents per college.

Based on the data, about a quarter of the participants were raised in the South Atlantic region as one might expect since Florida is located within this region; however, other high frequencies indicate the East South Central, West South Central, and Mountain regions as having a strong representation as well among the population surveyed. In addition, approximately 19% of the participants responded as having been raised outside the U.S.

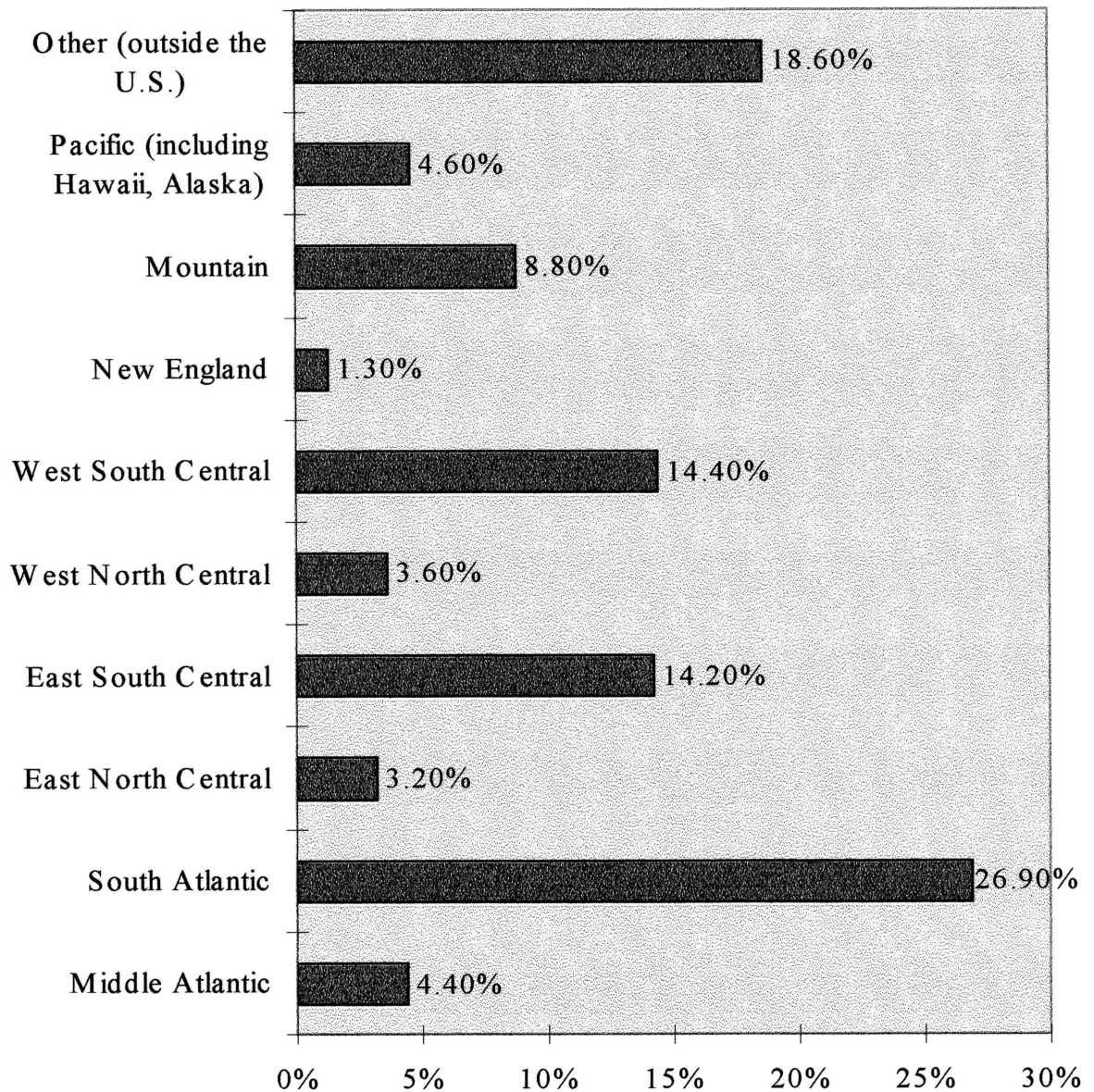


Figure 5. Distribution of respondents per region.

With regard to grade point average, the data indicate that 67 respondents have a GPA of 3.67-4.0, 182 respondents have a GPA of 3.0-3.66, 107 respondents have a GPA of 2.0-2.99, 5 respondents have a GPA of 1.0-1.99, and 5 respondents have a GPA of less than 1.0.

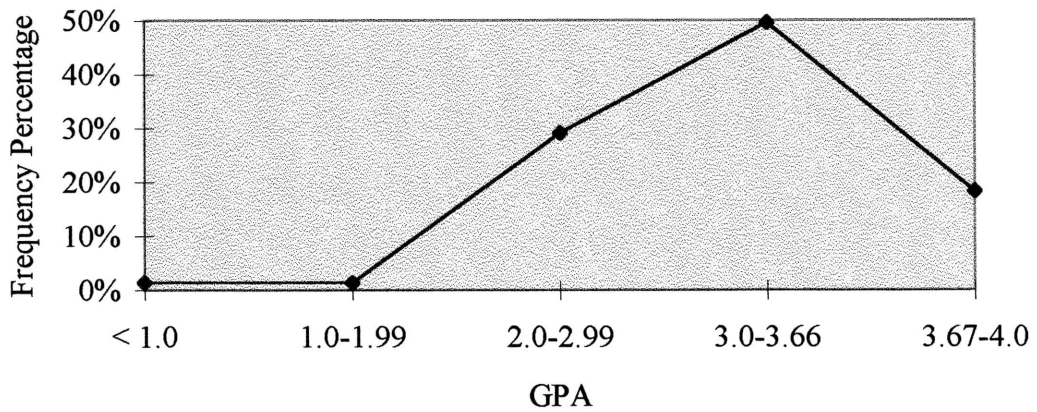


Figure 6. Frequency polygon of GPA distribution.

The age range frequency totals favored the age range from 21-24 ($\underline{n} = 137$), with ages 18-20 at ($\underline{n} = 108$) and 25-30 ($\underline{n} = 73$). Only five respondents of the surveyed population was over the age of 30, and only one was under the age of eighteen.

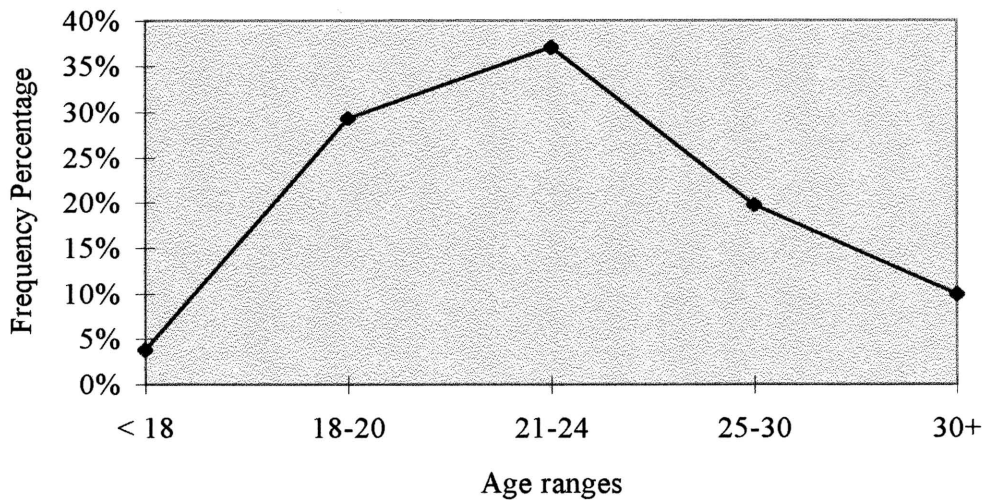


Figure 7. Frequency polygon of age distribution.

Of the 367 valid cases reported for the item regarding U.S. citizenship, 80% ($n = 294$) of the population surveyed claimed to be U.S. citizens. In addition, the item addressing ethnic/racial background reported that out of the 363 valid cases more than half of the participants (65.6%, $n = 238$) classified themselves as "White (not of Hispanic origin)". Of the other ethnic/racial classifications, the lowest number of participants (1.1%, $n = 4$) coincided with the classification "Asian or Pacific Islander". The other categories ranged from 7% to 12%: Black (not of Hispanic origin), 12.9% ($n = 47$); American Indian or Alaskan Native, 12.7% ($n = 46$); and Hispanic, 7.7% ($n = 28$).

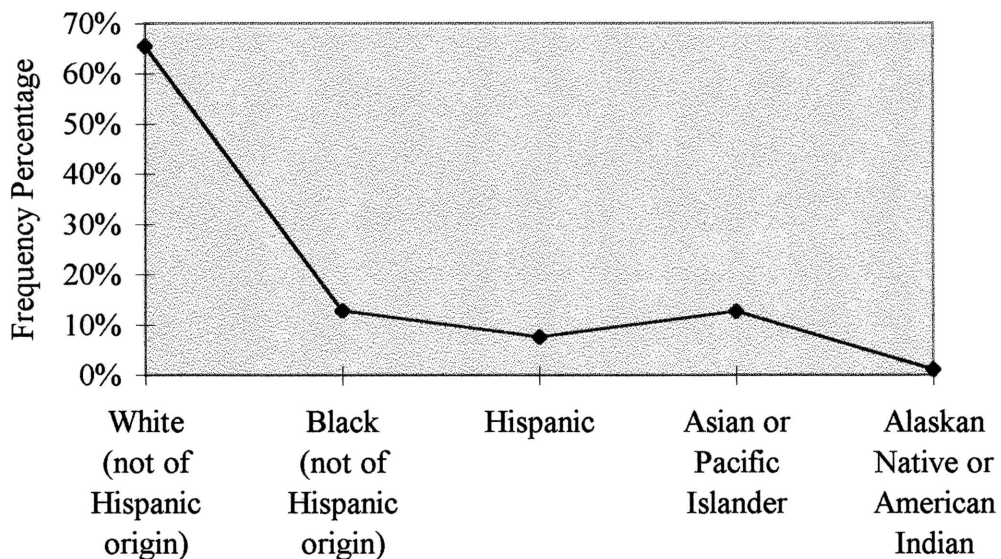


Figure 8. Frequency polygon of ethnic distribution.

Experience with ITAs

The second section of the instrument examines the presence and frequency of ITA classroom experiences in general and in the respondent's major field of study. The data collected indicates that the vast majority of respondents ($n = 322$ out of 370 valid cases,

87%) has experienced an ITA-taught course section. Moreover, most undergraduates have experienced about three ITA-taught course sections ($\underline{M} = 2.899$).

Table 6

Percentage of Respondent Exposure to Quantities of ITA-taught Course Sections

Number of Course Sections	Frequency	
	$\underline{n} = 348$	%
One course section	64	18.4
Two course sections	86	24.7
Three course sections	90	25.9
Four course sections	37	10.6
Five or more course sections	71	20.4

$\underline{M} = 2.899$, $\underline{SD} = 1.379$

Missing cases = 25

The data regarding exposure to ITA instruction in the respondent's major field also indicates an equal frequency among item choices. The frequency counts for the value labels 1-5, representing 0 to four or more course sections ranged from 61 to 81, approximately three course sections per student ($\underline{M} = 2.918$).

Table 7

Percentage to Respondent Exposure to ITA Instruction in Major Field

Number of Course Sections	<u>Frequency</u>	
	<u>n</u> = 353	%
No course sections	68	19.3
One course section	80	22.7
Two course sections	81	22.9
Three course sections	61	17.3
Four or more course sections	63	17.8

M = 2.918, SD = 1.379

Missing cases = 20

Another area addressed on the QUITA involves the number of required courses, not elective courses, taught by ITAs. The results indicate that very frequently undergraduates experience approximately three ITA-taught required course sections (M = 3.153).

Table 8

Percentage to Respondent Exposure to ITA Instruction in Required Courses

Number of Course Sections	<u>Frequency</u> <u>n</u> = 354	%
No course sections	51	14.4
One course section	61	17.2
Two course sections	102	28.8
Three course sections	63	17.8
Four or more course sections	77	21.8

M = 3.153, SD = 1.334

Missing cases = 19

The last two items in the questionnaire address the issue of conflict with ITAs and modes of resolution for such conflict. According to data collected, there are similar frequencies between item choices with regard to having encountered problems with ITAs. In fact, the "Yes" and "No" variables indicated a 46.9% (n = 175) and 46.1% (n = 172), respectively, with 7.0% (n = 26) missing cases.

When asked to define modes of resolution for conflicts with ITAs, the undergraduate responses predominantly favored learning the material alone (n = 161 out of 309 valid cases, 43.2%). It is important to note the high number of missing cases (n = 64) for this particular item.

Table 9

Frequency/Percentage of Modes of Resolution for ITA Conflict

Mode of Resolution	<u>Frequency</u> <u>n</u> = 309	%
Ask for help from the ITA	82	26.5
Talk to the course supervisor/academic advisor	38	12.3
Change/drop that section	8	2.6
Learn the material on my own or with classmates	161	52.1
Seek tutoring help outside of class	20	6.5

\underline{M} = 2.997, \underline{SD} = 1.404

Missing cases = 64

Scale of Preferences

An initial analysis of the third section of the instrument provided a summary of response frequencies and percentages per individual item. In addition, the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation calculations were obtained for each statement. This summary presented several interesting aspects. From the standpoint of attitude toward ITAs, items 20, 23, 27, 30, and 31 indicated a particular willingness on the part of the respondents to interact with ITAs in the classroom and an overall positive view toward ITA instruction and cultural diversity.

Table 11

Scale of Preferences Response Summary

Item #	Valid Cases*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	<u>Percentages</u>			Strongly Agree	M	Mdn	mode	SD
				Uncertain	Agree	Agree					
20. If I got an ITA with a foreign accent, I would try to transfer to a different section of the course.	370	21.2	37.59	26.4	11.4	3.5	2.386	2.000	2.000	1.051	
21. I can learn just as well from an ITA as I can from an American TA.	368	9.5	24.5	28.0	27.4	10.6	3.052	3.000	3.000	1.151	
22. When there are communication problems between students and ITAs, students can do very little to improve the situation.	369	8.9	29.3	18.2	30.6	13.0	3.095	3.000	4.000	1.213	
23. As a student, I would be willing to make adjustments in my speaking and listening styles in order to communicate better with an ITA.	369	10.8	9.2	14.9	52.0	13.0	3.472	4.000	4.000	1.161	
24. Having an international student as a roommate would be a very difficult situation.	368	26.1	37.0	26.4	7.3	3.3	2.247	2.000	2.000	1.026	
25. If I had trouble understanding an ITA, I would talk with him or her about it during office hours.	368	6.8	24.5	23.9	32.9	12.0	3.188	3.000	4.000	1.137	
26. Having a class with an ITA is an opportunity for developing cross-cultural communication skills.	369	9.5	23.6	19.2	35.8	11.9	3.171	3.000	4.000	1.194	

Item #	Valid Cases*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Percentages			Strongly Agree	M	Mdn	mode	SD
				Uncertain	Agree	Agree					
27. Students' attitudes affect their ability to understand ITAs in class.	369	6.5	7.6	14.9	49.3	21.7	3.721	4.000	4.000	1.086	
28. On the whole, ITAs show about the same level of concern for students as do American TAs.	367	4.4	10.6	30.5	39.2	15.3	3.504	4.000	4.000	1.016	
29. I am interested in international news and issues.	367	5.7	10.9	15.3	49.3	18.8	3.646	4.000	4.000	1.081	
30. American students can help ITAs in their adjustment to the U.S. classroom.	367	1.6	4.9	21.5	56.4	15.5	3.793	4.000	4.000	.820	
31. There are many ITAs who teach just as effectively as American TAs.	367	4.4	9.8	25.3	39.8	20.7	3.627	4.000	4.000	1.053	
32. It would be better if ITAs were not allowed to teach at this university.	367	30.6	35.2	20.5	7.9	5.7	2.230	2.000	2.000	1.138	
33. ITAs usually make a sincere effort to communicate effectively in the classroom.	365	2.7	11.8	21.4	47.7	16.4	3.633	4.000	4.000	.982	
34. In the future, I hope to travel and/or live abroad.	366	3.6	7.9	16.1	36.6	35.8	3.932	4.000	4.000	1.074	
35. The skills involved in intercultural communication are becoming increasingly important in today's society.	367	2.2	3.0	7.9	51.8	35.1	4.147	4.000	4.000	.853	
36. Many ITAs have difficulty understanding and answering students' questions.	366	2.7	16.9	26.8	34.7	18.9	3.500	4.000	4.000	1.064	
37. The intercultural communication that occurs in a class with an ITA has little relationship to the "real world".	367	11.4	39.2	30.0	16.1	3.3	2.605	2.000	2.000	.994	

Item #	Valid Cases*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Percentages			Strongly Agree	M	Mdn	mode	SD
				Uncertain	Agree	Agree					
38. If I could choose the section of a course myself, one of my main criteria would be to get into a section taught by an American TA.	367	9.3	25.3	30.5	23.2	11.7	3.027	3.000	3.000	1.152	
39. It is not reasonable to expect students to make listening and/or speaking adjustments in order to communicate with ITAs.	367	7.6	31.3	26.7	24.8	9.5	2.973	3.000	2.000	1.118	
40. Interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds will not be part of my planned career.	368	30.5	36.8	24.3	6.5	1.9	2.125	2.000	2.000	.984	

*n = 373

Further analysis of the third section of the data collected involved first identifying the statements as having either positive and negative qualities. The next step necessitated the reversal of the negative statements in order to rendered them basically positive and compatible with the other positive statements. Each of these statements was further associated to one of the three original constructs.

Table 10

Positive and Negative Quality/Construct Association of Statements

Items	Quality		Construct		
	+	-	1	2	3
20		√	√		
21	√			√	
22		√			√
23	√				√
24		√	√		
25	√				√
26	√		√		
27	√				√
28	√			√	
29	√		√		
30	√				√
31	√			√	
32		√		√	
33	√			√	
34	√		√		
35	√		√		
36		√		√	
37		√	√		
38		√		√	
39		√			√
40	√		√		
<u>n</u> = 21	13	8	8	7	6
<u>M</u>	62	38	38	33	29

ATITA Score

In analyzing the number of responses obtained from the 5-point Likert portion of the survey, the mean number of valid cases was 368 out of 373; therefore, a mean of six missing cases was identified, less than 2% of the total population surveyed. The range of the Likert-type scale responses and equivalent variables were as follows: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *uncertain* (3), *agree* (4), and *strongly agree* (5). Consequently, the lowest possible mean was 1.000, the neutral mean was 3.000, and the highest possible mean was 5.000. Furthermore, proportional ATITA scores were attained by dividing the mean score of the Likert portion of the questionnaire by three. Therefore, the potential range of proportional ATITA scores was from 0.33, representing low/negative views, to 1.00, representing neutral views, to 1.67, representing high/positive views. Thus, a Likert score of 1.000 corresponded to the mean score of responses limited to the ranking of *uncertain* ($\bar{M} = 3.000$) with a proportional ATITA score of 1.00. The data analysis for the present study placed undergraduate views and attitudes regarding ITAs between neutral and mildly positive ($\bar{M} = 3.461$, $\text{Mdn} = 3.619$, mode = 3.714, $\text{SD} = 1.065$). The calculations for the present study constitute the proportional ATITA score of 1.15, slightly more positive than the neutral mid point of 1.00.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study collected both facts and opinions regarding the interaction of undergraduate students and international teaching assistants. It is important to mention that it was not designed to assess ITA performance. Furthermore, it does not reflect the quality of ITA instruction in any particular college or department. The survey instrument was clearly written in such a way so that any individual could respond to the items, regardless of previous experience. The primary objective of this study was to ascertain undergraduate views about ITAs in a nonspecific sense.

The ATITA scores derived provided a way to determine the overall viewpoint of undergraduates toward ITAs and ITA instruction in general. In addition, the demographic information not only aided in describing the survey population, it also included data to reveal the frequency and manner with which undergraduates encounter ITAs in the classroom.

Results

Hypothesis #1

The population of undergraduates that was surveyed provided important information regarding their views about ITAs. The mean of frequency scores indicated that the surveyed population basically maintains a neutral to slightly positive attitude toward ITAs and ITA instruction. The vast majority of responses rated at the neutral mid

point of 3.000, and only in the case of two statements from the Scale of Preferences were the means closer to a 4.000 rating, indicative of a positive attitude; these two statements addressed intercultural communication and world travel in particular. Ultimately, the data indicated that the population surveyed feels somewhat neutral to the issue of learning under the tutelage of an ITA and demonstrates only a mild openness to this form of education. Therefore, Hypothesis #1 is rejected.

Hypothesis #2

The data regarding Experiences with ITAs is interesting in various ways. First of all, the results did not indicate a significant weight toward either having had problems with ITAs or not having had problems with ITAs. The frequency totals are almost equally divided in spite of the 21 missing responses. By indicating that there are as many undergraduates who have been faced with conflicts involving ITAs as there are those who haven't, it can be inferred that the encounters with ITAs tend to also be equally positive and negative. However, when undergraduates are faced with problems involving an ITA, the most common mode of resolving issues is through personal means. The undergraduates surveyed indicated that they resolve problematic issues with ITAs by learning the course material on their own or with classmates. It is significant to note that this method of resolving problems was selected by more than 50% of those who responded. Therefore, Hypothesis #2 is accepted.

Implications

The claim of a neutral to mildly positive view point among the undergraduates surveyed has some intriguing features. The marginal indifference could be attributed to numerous aspects. One such reason, could be connected the year of study. The junior and

senior classmen accounted for a combined 80% of the population surveyed, and often junior and senior classmen have learned how to effectively deal with academic conflicts. Not only an ITA but also a professor, a classmate, or even a university staff member could pose problems for undergraduates, so they develop the resourcefulness of dealing with problems in an academic setting. It seems obvious that students learn to overcome academic obstacles throughout their educational careers as a means of survival; thus, dealing with a non-native teaching assistant can easily become a small detail in the larger picture for an experienced upper classmen.

Another possible reason for such accommodation on the part of undergraduates could stem from a general exposure to the growing number of non-natives in the state of Florida. In addition, linguistic and cultural diversity are more commonplace and accepted by people in the American culture today. An ITA could easily provide undergraduates with novel experiences and interesting discussions.

And thirdly, it must also be noted that the results are taken from a distinctive body of individuals, those who have persevered to the point of reaching a junior-level course. Had this questionnaire been administered to the freshmen class, the results may have been drastically different. By the time a student reaches the second half of an undergraduate degree program, if they haven't already learned how to collaborate with just about anything that comes their way, they have probably already dropped out of school. Therefore, attrition may have a role in the results of the present study in that only the survivors are remaining, and having a positive attitude in general is probably an integral part of being a survivor.

To further support this point of the self-sufficiency of undergraduates, the responses regarding conflicts with ITAs demonstrate another form of conflict management. When conflicts with ITAs arise, the undergraduate has the tendency of

attempting to resolve the issue independently. Either they learn the material on their own, or they form a "quasi-support group" and attempt to help each other learn the course material. Both methods infer independence in learning and the notion that the ITA-related obstacle is quite conquerable.

There are two other issues to consider regarding this topic. Another important result from the data indicated that the second most frequently employed method of resolving conflicts with ITAs involves asking the ITA for assistance. It is clearly a positive indicator when an undergraduate employs this method for resolving issues. In this way, both the undergraduate and the ITA have the opportunity of nurturing a working relationship. The linguistic and cultural ramifications of such an encounter can provide beneficial lessons for both parties.

And lastly, the item choice of changing to another course section as a mode of resolving conflicts involving ITAs was the most infrequently used means of remedying issues of this type. Consequently it can be inferred that undergraduates appear to make every attempt to deal with the issues of ITA instruction, have found effective means for resolving problems, and do not retain a negative attitude because of conflict.

As an additional personal note, it should be mentioned that the overall reaction to the actual administration and the study at hand was quite positive. Most students seemed to truly want to speak out, and some even requested an e-mail of the results.

Recommendations

In light of the fact that the surveyed population indicated a neutral to slightly positive attitude toward ITAs, the recommendation at this point is to assist the entire relationship between undergraduates and ITAs. The lines of communication are vital features in maintaining effective ITA instruction (Fox & Gay, 1994; Plakans, 1997;

Twale, Shannon & Moore, 1997). Those lines go in many directions, from the undergraduates to the ITAs to administrative personnel. Therefore, the University of Central Florida should follow the lead of undergraduates by openly merging the various worlds of those involved and by further examining the present situation. Other studies should be conducted to possibly learn about the lower classmen's perspective of the ITA issue and facilitate the undergraduate-ITA relationship if needed. In addition, similar studies such as the present one can be directed to the administrators in the hopes of identifying areas of concern and developing assistance for those individuals.

In conclusion, should the University of Central Florida decide to streamline the acclimation process of ITAs and undergraduates, it is highly recommended that a thorough review of the many existing programs throughout the U.S. be conducted in order to assemble a compilation of the most functional elements present in the ITA training programs of other institutions. There is much literature available regarding ITA curriculum design as well as a growing corpus of individuals wholly dedicated and specialized in ITA assessment and training. As seen at UCF, ITA instruction can offer an effective mode of learning to students, so all should be done to improve the working relationship between ITAs and undergraduate students.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Written Permission of Wanda S. Fox

Written Permission of Wanda S. Fox

Subject:

Re: QUITA

Date:

Wed, 14 Oct 1998 14:43:11 -0500

From:

Wanda Fox <wfox@purdue.edu>

To:

Marcella Farina <mfarina@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu>

References:

1

Marcella,

You have my permission to use the QUITA -- do you have a copy? If so, please use it with this citation:

Wanda S. Fox (1991). Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. Used by permission.

Do you have other questions about administration of need further information? If so, please let me know. I assume you have seen the article that I published with Geneva Gay in the Review of Higher Education and that Barbara Plakans published in TESOL Quarterly. If not, I could provide you with reprints of mine. Additional info also is available in my dissertation. I could send copies of relevant pages if that's helpful.

Best wishes with your research.

Wanda Fox

Marcella Farina wrote:

>

> 10/13/98

Appendix B

Questionnaire of Undergraduates about International Teaching Assistants

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Questionnaire of Undergraduates about International Teaching Assistants (QUITA)*

Please respond to the following items by marking the appropriate answer on the answer sheet; do not make any marks on the questionnaire. In addition, you are to remain anonymous; do not write your name.

I. Background Information

1. SEX: A = Male

B = Female

2. EDUCATION: Indicate your year in school.

A = Freshman

B = Sophomore

C = Junior

D = Senior

E = Other

3. ACADEMIC COLLEGE: Indicate the college in which you are enrolled.

A = College of Arts and Sciences

B = College of Engineering

C = College of Business Administration

D = College of Health and Public Affairs

E = College of Education

4./5. REGION: Indicate the region in which you resided during the majority of your elementary and high school years. Please refer to the map; then choose only one region.

4. A = Region 1 - New England

5. A = Region 6 - West North Central

B = Region 2 - Middle Atlantic

B = Region 7 - West South Central

C = Region 3 - South Atlantic

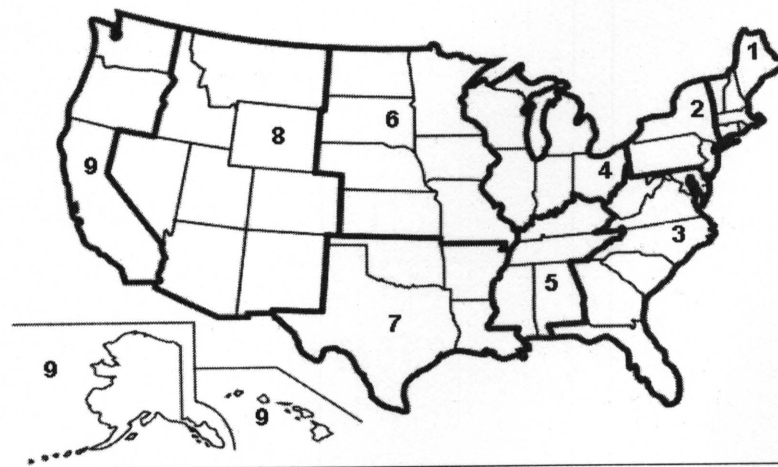
C = Region 8 - Mountain

D = Region 4 - East North Central

D = Region 9 - Pacific [including Hawaii, Alaska]

E = Region 5 - East South Central

E = Region 10 - Other [outside the U.S.]



*Fox, W. S. (1991). West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University. Adapted with permission.

6. Your estimated cumulative grade point average (GPA) at the end of this semester:
A = 3.67-4.0 B = 3.0-3.66 C = 2.0-2.99 D = 1.0-1.99 E = less than 1.0

7. Your age group:
A = Under 18 yrs. B = 18-20 yrs. C = 21-24 yrs. D = 25-30 yrs. E = over 30 yrs.

8. Are you a U.S. citizen? A = Yes B = No

9. Your predominant ethnic/racial background:
A = White (not of Hispanic origin) B = Black (not of Hispanic origin)
C = Hispanic D = Asian or Pacific Islander
E = American Indian or Alaskan Native

10. Your current living arrangements:
A = Live in student housing (residence hall, on-campus apartment)
B = Live near campus alone or with other students (apartment, house, fraternity/sorority)
C = Live at home with your parents
D = Live at home with your spouse/children, or non-students
E = Other arrangements, not mentioned

11. Indicate the type of area in which you resided during the majority of your elementary and high school years.
Choose only one. A = rural area B = town of less than 10,000
C = small city of 10,000-50,000 D = city of 50,000-100,000
E = city of over 100,000

12. Are you involved in any campus organizations or activities, such as fraternities/sororities, athletics (intercollegiate or intramural), government, publications, musical groups, honors programs, etc.?
A = Yes B = No

13. Have you ever traveled outside the U.S.? A = Yes B = No

II. Experience with International Teaching Assistants (ITAs)

14. Have you ever had a course or section (discussion, recitation, lab) of a course in which the instructor was an international teaching assistant (ITA) whose first language was not English? A = Yes B = No

15. How many courses have you had in which an ITA had some teaching responsibilities?
A = One B = Two C = Three D = Four E = Five or more

16. How many of these courses with an ITA have been in your major field(s)?
A = None B = One C = Two D = Three E = Four or more

17. How many of these courses with an ITA have been required for your program of study?
A = None B = One C = Two D = Three E = Four or more

18. Did you have any problems with any of your ITAs? A = Yes B = No

19. If your answer to question 18 was "Yes", what was the first means you used to work out problems with an ITA? If your answer to question 18 was "No", what means of solving problems do you think you would have used first?
A = Ask for help from the ITA
B = Talk to the course supervisor/academic advisor
C = Change/drop that section
D = Learn the material on my own or with classmates
E = Seek tutoring help outside of class

III. Scale of Preferences

Please circle the appropriate numbers to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Some statements are similar, but read and respond to each one as accurately as you can.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
A	B	C	D	E

20. If I got an ITA with a foreign accent, I would try to transfer to a different section of the course.
21. I can learn just as well from an ITA as I can from an American TA.
22. When there are communication problems between students and ITAs, students can do very little to improve the situation.
23. As a student, I would be willing to make adjustments in my speaking and listening styles in order to communicate better with an ITA.
24. Having an international student as a roommate would be a very difficult situation.
25. If I had trouble understanding an ITA, I would talk with him or her about it during office hours.
26. Having a class with an ITA is an opportunity for developing cross-cultural communication skills.
27. Students' attitudes affect their ability to understand ITAs in class.
28. On the whole, ITAs show about the same level of concern for students as do American TAs.
29. I am interested in international news and issues.
30. American students can help ITAs in their adjustment to the U.S. classroom.
31. There are many ITAs who teach just as effectively as American TAs.
32. It would be better if ITAs were not allowed to teach at this university.
33. ITAs usually make a sincere effort to communicate effectively in the classroom.
34. In the future, I hope to travel and/or live abroad.
35. The skills involved in intercultural communication are becoming increasingly important in today's society.
36. Many ITAs have difficulty understanding and answering students' questions.
37. The intercultural communication that occurs in a class with an ITA has little relationship to the "real world".
38. If I could choose the section of a course myself, one of my main criteria would be to get into a section taught by an American TA.
39. It is not reasonable to expect students to make listening and/or speaking adjustments in order to communicate with ITAs.
40. Interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds will not be part of my planned career.

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Please complete the questionnaire, answering each item truthfully and to the best of your knowledge. In order to protect your right to privacy, please do not indicate your name. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. You are free to withdraw your consent and/or discontinue participation in this survey at any time, without prejudice. A period of twenty minutes has been allotted for the execution of this survey; please work efficiently. Participation in this survey is without compensation. You are welcome to contact the Principal Researcher at the address below about any inquiries regarding this procedure.

In signing this consent form, you hereby agree to indemnify and hold harmless, the University of Central Florida (UCF), its officers, its Review Board (IRB), its agents, the Principal Researcher, and its employees. If you should suffer physical injury during participation in this research project, the University will provide referrals to appropriate health care facilities. Any treatment you receive will be charged to your insurance carrier, to any other party responsible of your treatment costs, or to you. The University of Central Florida (UCF) cannot provide any financial compensation due to injury suffered during this research study.

I have read the procedure described above. I agree to participate in the procedure, and I have received a copy of this description.

Signature of Participant

Date

Information regarding your rights as a research volunteer may be obtained from:

Marcella A. Farina, Principal Researcher
University of Central Florida
Center for Multilingual Multicultural Studies
P. O. Box 163177 - Trailer 547
Orlando, Florida 32816-3177
Telephone: (407) 823-5515
E-mail: mfarina@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu

Gino O. Grossi, IRB Coordinator
University of Central Florida
Office of Sponsored Research (OSR)
4000 Central Florida Boulevard
Orlando, Florida 32816-0150
Telephone: (407) 823-0066/-3673
E-mail: ggrossi@mail.ucf.edu

REFERENCES

- Creswell, J. (1990, October 22). Oral communication competences causes debate at UI. Daily Iowan, p. A1.
- Douglas, D. & Selinker, L. (1994). Native and nonnative teaching assistants: A case study of discourse domains and genres. In C. G. Madden & C. L. Myers (Eds.), Discourse and performance of international teaching assistants (pp 221-230). Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- Fox, W. S. & Gay, G. (1994). Functions and effects of international teaching assistants. Review of Higher Education, 18, 1-24.
- Halleck, G. B., & Moder, C. L. (1995). Testing language and teaching skills of international teaching assistants: The limits of compensatory strategies. TESOL Quarterly, 29, 733-758.
- Jacobs, L. C. & Friedman, C. B. (1988). Student achievement under foreign teaching associates compared with native teaching associates. Journal of Higher Education, 59, 551-564.
- Marsh, H. (1983). Multidimensional ratings of teaching effectiveness by students from different academic settings and their relation to student/course instruction characteristics. Journal of Educational Psychology, 75, 150-156.
- Marsh, H. (1991). Multidimensional student evaluations of teaching ineffectiveness: A test of alternative higher-order structures. Journal of Educational Psychology, 83, 285-296.

- Marsh, H. (1982a). SEEQ: A reliable, valid and useful instrument for collecting students' evaluations of university teaching. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 52, 77-95.
- Marsh, H. (1987). Students' evaluation of university teaching: Research findings, methodological issues, and directions for future research. International Journal of Educational Research, 11, 253-288.
- Marsh, H. (1982b). Validity of students' evaluations of college teaching: A multitrait-multimethod analysis. Journal of Educational Psychology, 74, 264-279.
- Monoson, P. K. & Thomas, C. F. (1993). Oral English proficiency policies for faculty in U. S. higher education. Review of Higher Education, 16, 127-140.
- New census data show more children are poor. (1992, May 29). New York Times, p. A12.
- Plakans, B. S. (1997). Undergraduates' experiences with and attitudes toward international teaching assistants. TESOL Quarterly, 31, 95-119.
- Rubin, D., Angeletti, S., Caudill, S., Harzog, B., Kilgore, M., Li, L., Merrifield, T., Tighe, R., Wang, G. J., & Yearley, J. (1995, May). Effects of language and race on undergraduates' perceptions of international instructors: Further studies of language and attitude in higher education. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Albuquerque, NM (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 384 932)
- Savignon, S. (1983). Communicative competence: Theory and classroom practice. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Smith, R. M., Bryd, P., Nelson, G. L., Barrett, R. P., & Constantinides, J. C. (1992). Crossing pedagogical oceans: International teaching assistants in U.S.

- undergraduate education (Report No. EDO HE 92 8). Washington, DC: George Washington University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 358 812)
- Smith, J., Meyers, C., & Burkhalter, A. (1992). Communicate: Strategies for international teaching assistants. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Smyrniou, G. (1995). When it comes to my major, it matters if you are foreign or not. Reading Improvement, 32, 227-235.
- Standards of Competent Professional Performance, 3 Fla. Stat. Rev. § 6B-5 (1994).
- Thomas, C. F. & Monoson, P. K. (1993). Oral English language proficiency of ITAs: Policy, implementation, and contributing factors. Innovative for Higher Education, 17, 195-209.
- Twale, D. J., Shannon, D. M., & Moore, M. S. (1997). NGTA and IGTA training and experience: Comparisons between self-ratings and undergraduate student evaluations. Innovative Higher Education, 22, 61-77.
- Williams, J., Barnes, G., Gerard-Finger, A., & Ruffin, P. (1987, April). Training FTAs: Report of a needs analysis. Paper presented at the annual meeting of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Miami, FL (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 189 436)
- Yule, G. & Hoffman, P. (1993). Enlisting the help of U. S. undergraduates in evaluating international teaching assistants. TESOL Quarterly, 27, 323-327.
- Zikopoulos, M. (Ed.) (1989). Open doors 1989/90. New York: Institute of International Education, 1990.

